Unit 1.3

Identity: What does it mean to BE?

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| Essential Questions |
| * What does it mean to be an American? * What does it mean to have identity? * Who determines your identity: society, family, or you? * Can you have freedom without identity? * Can a person change their identity (i.e. not just their name, clothing, and location, but who they are inside?) |
| Course: English Honors  Grade Level: 10  Designed by: Megan M. Springs  CI 454E  Fall 2014 |

Rationale

Students must learn to work as a part of a classroom community and learn to find pleasure and satisfaction in the expression of their ideas and the ideas of others. The highlighted unit in this packet is the third unit within the first semester. The academic year has been divided into two semesters, and each semester contains sub-themes that support an overarching theme for the semester. Each unit has been designed to build on former lessons and support student skill sets and knowledge that they will need to complete the following unit of study. Throughout the first semester, each unit will address the same weekly objectives as they relate to the different types of media that students will read and analyze. These weekly objectives include: Sensory Details, Mood, Author Perspective, Organization, and Processes for Writing.

The general organization of each semester and unit is in part modeled after Chapter 4: of Peter Smogorinsky’s text, Teaching English by Design. Smogorinsky’s ideas on creating “overall coherence [and meaningful learning] in the students’ experiences” through “curricular conversations: the overarching concepts that allow for extended explorations of key ideas and that provide continuity across various units” inspired me as I considered what and how I wanted my students to learn, as well as what I believe will be meaningful to them as individuals and prepare them for life learning. I wanted to give students a deeper understanding of concepts within different media and how they can utilize them in their own personal and academic reading and writing endeavors. My desire for the lessons that students learn from these units is that they are taken beyond the classroom and support life-long literacy of media, culture, and identify for my students.

Prior to beginning Unit 1.3, students will have completed an introductory unit to the course that will introduce them to procedures for success in my classroom, their own learning needs as individuals, and their personal writing interests as authors. Students will have also completed an introductory unit on prose fiction; where they will have learned foundational information about writing through experience with fiction. Each of the five weekly objectives will have already been discussed in Units 1.1 and 1.2, including: Sensory Details, Mood, Author Perspective, Organization, and Processes for Writing. I intend that this ritual of investigative practice will help students create a habit for procedures of learning in my classroom and learn to recognize and analyze these ideas on their own as well.

Unit 1.3 begins with an introduction to American literature as a unique genre and highlights different literature and media, both classic and modern, which provide students with examples of the idea of identifying as an American. Students encounter a wide range of media including: digital photographs, music videos, historical texts, and a short story that exemplify American cultural themes. Students will read various types of literature in which they apply background knowledge to create inferences about American culture as a unique identity, listen and analyze different kinds of music, identify sensory details, and practice application of learned concepts in a formative writing assessment.

The overarching objective for Week 2 of Unit 1.3 is identifying and creating mood in narrative essays. Students will utilize Peter Elbows strategy for “Free Writing” in order to respond to two essential questions: what it means to have identity and who determines identity for each person. Students will also participate in a Directed Reading and Thinking Activity (DR & TA) with a modified Question and Answer Relationship, as they read and evaluate concepts related to conflict, identity, and imagery in Julia Alvarez’s poem, “Exile” (Bomer, p. 94, 99). I chose this activity because it allows students to take on the role of a scientist as they investigate how the author creates mood in her poem and why this is significant to her cultural identity as an author and a person. This week, students will write their first formal essay of the unit and participate in a peer editing workshop; where they will provide Praise, Question, Polish (PQP) on peer work. Smogorinski advocates for consistent opportunities for peer feedback in chapter 7, “Responding to Student Writing,” of his text, Teaching English by Design. I utilize Kaminski’s PQP strategy often in weekly assignments as a continued process for improved writing; as students receive feedback and take on the role of “critical readers” of peer work (Smogorinski, p. 98).

In week 3, students learn to identify and analyze author perspective in both poetry and visual media. Students read “Pawn Shop” by Sherman Alexi, which highlights the Native American struggle to overcome the decimation of their culture and people as Western European culture continues to thrive in America. I chose this particular text in order to do two things: I wanted to create an opportunity for students to read poems with a variety of structures and cultural themes, as well as ask students to think about what it means for a Native American to identify as American. Most of the other texts selected highlight immigration or natural born American identity. This poem, as well as the following day’s visual art by Kara Walker offers a different perspective on what can be a very grey American identity. Students also read a short story by Joanne Hypolite that highlights what it means for someone to have two kinds of American identities. This supports ideas presented in Alexi’s and Walker’s work, as well as provides additional learning opportunities for historical context of African American Civil rights in the United States. Instead of a formal writing assignment for this week, students will create their own silhouette image and write a short, informal explanation about their artistic choices and how their art reflects their own identity as a person.

In week 4, students learn about how a narrative is organized in order to create specific effects for the reader. Students participate n a jigsaw reading and discussion as they compare the structure of the first chapter of Maxine Hong Kingston’s Warrior Woman, “No Name Woman” with their previously learned knowledge of the way that a fiction narrative is structured, in order to recognize the literary elements that create a personal narrative. In addition, students will have the opportunity to mutually compose a list of interview questions to ask Ms. Kingston and speak with her in a pre-arranged video chat. I will encourage students to ask questions about her writing processes, what inspired this personal narrative, and discuss her message and purpose behind her writing. The video chat incorporates the use of technology for communication purposes in which students can directly interact with the author. It also provides an opportunity for students to meet the author in person and create a personal connection with her and her work.

After the video chat, students will complete a journal log that will relate their feelings and experiences during the interview. Optional leads will be provided that will help them consider questions they may have liked to ask, what they wanted to know more about, a comparison of their impressions before and after meeting Ms. Kingston, as well as information related to what they have learned as writers.

There are also a few independent reading days that I have scheduled throughout the unit. These activities are not “fillers,” they are purposely intended to provide students with opportunities within the class time to simply read for pleasure and grow their reading illiteracies and practices. On pages 52 – 56 of his text, Building Adolescent Literacy in Today’s English Classrooms, Randy Bomer advocates for special time given to students where they can read for pleasure on their own terms because this creates a reading routine that help students become avid readers. Allowing students to lie down on the floor, stretch out across two desks, or otherwise selecting their reading place in the room or even outside of the classroom, encourages students to find ways of reading that is comfortable and pleasurable to them. I want to create these opportunities for my own students, regardless of the many other activities that we are busy completing throughout the year. I want them to learn that reading isn’t just about passing a test or writing an essay. I want them to know that reading is fun.

The unit also includes an opportunity for students to experience alternative literature as they read and discuss Gene Luen Yang’s graphic novel, American Born Chinese. Students will receive background information on the author, complete their own graphic text in the form of a comic strip, and relate Yang’s story to how cultural expectations can create obstacles for others who do not share our individual culture and how we can overcome this as a school community.

The last two weeks of this unit are devoted to a writing workshop in which students will brainstorm, draft, and edit their own personal narratives. Peer review plays a major role in the drafting and editing processes, as well as the introduction of different brush stroke techniques through daily mini-lessons in order to help give students ideas on new ways that they can continue to make their essays shine. In addition to the writing assignment, students will also construct their own culture mask that will present who they are as individuals. On the final day of class, students will showcase their work for each other in a gallery walk and work will be displayed in the classroom.

The more that I reflect on my own experience as a teacher and what I want to do for my students, I realize that my teaching philosophy rests on two main principals: students must learn to belong to and participate in a classroom community and what they learn in class must be something that is useful and meaningful to them in life as individuals. By creating lessons for students to engage in multiple experiences with each concept and providing them with opportunities to express those experiences with a community minded perspective.